Ontario Bisexual Network

Newsletter June, 1995

Managing Identity

I consider my "official" coming out to be the first bisexual discussion group that I attended in March 1994. That event marks a turning point in my life. Before, I had thought about being bisexual yet never really knew how, where, when or if I would ever be able to explore a side of myself that I had privately affirmed and yet publicly hidden for eight years. I attended that meeting desperately needing both answers and a forum for posing questions. Uppermost in my mind was the following: How do bisexual people express their bisexuality in their everyday lives? What living arrangements work for them? Who do they love? Who do they fuck?

So, as I became more comfortable attending meetings, I started asking everyone how they personally "managed" (it was the best word I could think of at the time) their bisexuality, because I had no idea how I was going to "manage" mine, only that I had to do something ... soon. What I found was incredible diversity. And confusion. And comfort. What I discovered was a people in process, exploring their sexuality, searching for a way to affirm their sexual identity. When I now think on the term bisexuality, I see and feel and hear nothing static. Rather, I sense a fluidity within the definition as it expands and contracts through a series of personal and collective negotiations.

There is the temptation to see bisexuality as vogue, cool, a fad, a way to make a statement. It's cool to be bisexual because, heh, who wants to be "normal"? Why not tap into the alternative scene by playing a part-time homosexual role? Slights like these serve to relegate the idea of bisexuality to the margins and weaken its viability as a legitimate life option. I do not believe bisexuality is a fad. It is a mode of life that cannot simply be classified as somewhere between straight and gay. Such a classification denies bisexuality its own definition, whatever that may be.

I believe that the political power within bisexuality lies in the very difficulty inherent in defining it. And there is no doubt in my mind that there is a political element to bisexuality. If the concept of bisexuality had no power, why are so many threatened by it? Bisexuality is powerful because it involves the right of every individual to acknowledge and negotiate their sexuality in personally acceptable terms. It is about people making free life choices, choices that often stretch the boundaries of accepted societal norms, both within the straight and gay community. It is not individualism unchecked either, as some may charge. Negotiation cannot be a monologue. It's a dialogue with those around us, those we choose to love.

I still haven't figured out how I will "manage" my bisexuality. I guess I'm managing it right now - I'm in the process of negotiating my lifestyle.

- Krista Taves

Queerer Than Queer, Outsider Than Outside

excerpts from an address given by Carolyn Downes before Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual Youth Conference in Toronto in January 1995.

I want to say, first of all, how pleased I am to have this opportunity to speak to you, today, although I have to say that it's somewhat of a mixed blessing. You see, when I met with my fellow panelists over a week ago to discuss what we would actually do I discovered that as far as anyone knew, I was the only bisexual content scheduled in the conference proceedings. Kyle, David and Alison all agreed to make their comments shorter so that I would have more time with you, which was good, in that I would have more time to expand upon a few ideas, but scary, in that it leaves me the rather daunting task of representing the bisexual position at this conference. I hope, if I am not equal to the task, that you will not judge all bisexuals by my performance.

Being possibly the only open bisexual panelist at this conference, I find myself in a position that is very familiar to most bisexuals in the gay/lesbian community. I often think of us

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Queerer than Queer

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as the rock thrown into the middle of the pond. Everything is bubbling along quite nicely in the world of lesbian/gay politics, and then suddenly some bisexual comes along and throws a rock into the middle of the stew. So, I guess I have a proud bisexual tradition to live up to, and I shall try to stir things up a little during the time that I have with you.

Since this is a conference on youth, I should also say that I am at a distinct disadvantage in not having a young colleague on this panel who can give you his or her perspective on what it is like to grow up bisexual today. It seems to me that we "elders" can learn a lot from the more accepting attitudes of today's youth. I'm sorry that we will not have the benefit of a young bisexual's perceptions and feelings....

Even though this conference purports to be for gay, lesbian and **bisexual** participants, it didn't escape your notice that the bisexual perspective was not, for the most part represented. Just the fact that the older people here referred to themselves almost exclusively as "Gays and Lesbians" and to the youth as "Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual Youth" reveals a great deal about the attitudes of the elders in the queer community. One gets the impression that, once one passes over the imaginary line that separates youth from adult, bisexuality simply does not exist. Presumably, one passes through that phase into mature queerhood, and the bisexual issue never surfaces again....

Being bisexual in the gay/lesbian world is what I call being outsider than outside. Like many gays and lesbians struggling with their sexual identity, first I tried to ignore my feelings, then I tried to make them go away. It me a long time to summon the necessary ego strength to get past my self hatred and finally admit that my bisexuality was not a phase, it was not going to go away, and I was not going to spend another second feeling guilty about something over which I had no control.

When I finally decided to come out a second time, the only thing that made it worth it this was that this time, I felt totally in sinc with what I was doing. I knew exactly what my sexual orientation was, and that in itself gave me a strength and a solidity that I had never known before in my life. I could finally understand what my gay and lesbian friends had been talking about when they described themselves coming home when they came out. Perhaps more importantly, I finally got in touch with that deep, clear rage that comes to all of us when we realize how we have been made to hate ourselves because of who we love. I was finally permitting myself to be all of me, unfragmented and unsuppressed....

The irony of the bisexual dilemma is that it is queer politics itself, as it is currently constituted, which helps keep so many of us in the closet. The unreliability and deceptiveness of which we are often accused is, to a certain degree, **created** by the open hostility of the gay/lesbian community in which so many of us live and work.

I suspect that an emotion common to most bisexuals is a deep sense of loneliness and alienation from both the straight and queer world. One of the most powerful driving forces of the human race is the need for identity within a community, and for the bisexual, the risk of coming out is that we gain our identity, at the cost of a community.

Today, I not only want to reach out to those of you in the audience who may be bisexual and afraid to admit it to yourself or your colleagues. I also want to reach out to the gay and lesbian community and talk about how important it is for all sexual minorities to work together against our common oppression.

Want Ads in this Newsletter

In response to queries on this topic, yes, want ads will be accepted for upcoming OBN newsletters, although we reserve the right to refuse/edit such ads, and we would ask for a donation to the OBN from those persons seeking to place an ad.

So, if you're looking for a new lover, friend, bi-friendly place to live, or hard to find Sophie B. Hawkins/ Billy Joe Armstrong memorabilia, drop the editors a line (see page 3).

CANADIAN LESBIAN
AND GAY ARCHIVES